Report Cites Violations Of Privacy

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Criminal information systems should be tightly controlled to protect individual privacy, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals said yesterday.

The commission noted that police agencies collect and disseminate "millions of items" about "crimes, arrests. charges, prosecutions, convictions, sentences, correctional supervision, accused persons, stolen property, motor vehicle licenses and registrations and similar data."

Because of this vast process, the commission added, "The threat to individual rights from unrestricted intelligence operations is direct. Leaks occur. Details which should be strictly private become public news. Reputations may be destroyed and careers ruined."

The commission recommended that each state enact legislation setting up standards for protecting the security and privacy of the files. Each state also should create a security and privacy council, half of whose members should be private citizens, to administer the standards, it said.

All information—including fingerprints and photos—about an individual who is arrested but not convicted should be returned to him within 60 days after final disposition of his case, the report recommended.

Exceptions would be made in cases where the person is subject to another pending criminal action or has been convicted of another crime.

The commission said access to criminal histories in the information systems "should be made available only to public agencies which have both a 'need to know' and a 'right to know' . . . The media, credit rating services, and the like should not receive from criminal justice agencies, either directly or indirectly, any information from criminal justice information systems."

Jack C. Landau of Newhouse Newspapers, a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, said if commission members are advocating restrictions on press access to pertinent background information on criminal suspects, "they're going to have a fight on their hands."